



The Landscape in Montana: Missing Indigenous Persons

Data Analysis

A 2016 report from the National Crime Information Center stated 5,712 reports of missing AI/AN women and girls were entered¹ yet only 116 of those cases were entered into NamUs,² the U.S. Department of Justice’s federal missing persons database. Data surrounding missing indigenous women became a growing concern both nationally and within Montana.

According to a 2018 report by the Associated Press “...nobody knows precisely how cases of missing and murdered Native American women happen nationwide because many cases go unreported, others aren't well-documented and no government database specifically tracks them.”³

In 2017, the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI), a tribal epidemiology center, began studying cases of missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women and girls. To understand the lack of data within some national systems, UIHI sought to collect data from urban American Indian communities across the United States, including cities in Montana. The result of searches from law enforcement records, state and national databases, media coverage, social media and accounts from community and family members indicated 506 unique cases of MMIW across 71 select cities. 128 were missing, 280 were murdered, 98 were listed as unknown status, and an additional 153 cases were not present within law enforcement records. Montana was the fifth highest state with number of total cases (41).⁴

Members from the Montana Attorney General’s Office and the Department of Justice began an in-depth review of missing persons in February 2020 with the intent to help law enforcement agencies locate missing persons, inform policymakers to craft better solutions, and help communities prevent people from going missing. The data included every missing person entry over a three-year period, 2017-2019, from the Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse. Additional records from the Department of Public Health and Human Services’ Child and Family Services Division (CFSD), and autopsy reports from the state crime laboratory were reviewed. Reports of missing persons were entered by 100 law enforcement agencies including sheriff’s offices, police departments, 911 centers, tribal police departments, and US BIA law enforcement. See Appendix B. The data analysis revealed the following key observations:

1. 5,570 missing person entries were made to the Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse (3 entries had coding errors, therefore the number of entries in the analysis is **5,567**)
2. There were **3,254** unique individuals

¹ Kaylen Howard and Tilly Marlatt, “Murdered and Missing Native American Women Challenge Police and Courts,” The Center for Public Integrity, August 27, 2018, <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/murdered-and-missing-native-american-women-challenge-police-and-courts/>

² Department of Justice (2018). NamUs. Retrieved from <https://www.namus.gov/MissingPersons/Search>

³ Associated Press, “Task Force on Missing Native Americans Resumes Sessions,” June 2, 2020, <https://www.nhnews.com/news/2020/jun/02/task-force-missing-native-americans-resumes-sessio/>

⁴ <http://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf>

3. 80.5% of the individuals were under the age of 18
4. Little significant difference between the number of females and males who go missing
5. 60% of the entries were tied to juveniles who went missing more than once
6. Juveniles went missing up to 21 times over the three-year period
7. Most people reported missing are found - 97.7%
8. Of the top 10 counties with missing persons per capita, three included reservations

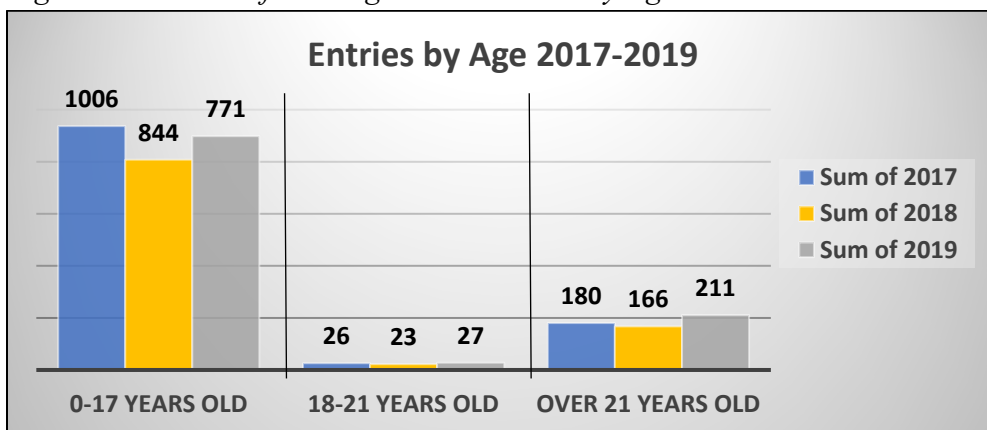
Data analysis was conducted by DOJ staff for Phase 1 of a potential multi-phase project. Although key points were observed and are listed above, no other conclusions were drawn that would lead one to identify causal issues leading to a missing person (i.e. social services, poverty, intersections with domestic and sexual violence, etc.). Additional phases of data review could include data from the Office of Public Instruction, Office of the Court Administrator, CFSD, juvenile and probation records, and tribal court records.

The Montana State University Statistical Consulting and Research Services group provided validation and analysis of the Montana Department of Justice data project. See Appendix D for methodology and further information on the data analysis.

Age

Juveniles under the age of 18 make up approximately one quarter of Montana’s population (229,434)⁵ with slightly more males than females (m=117,651; f=111,783). Of 5,500+ entries in the Missing Persons Clearinghouse, there were 3,254 unique individuals. More than 80% of those individuals (2,621) were under the age of 18. See Appendix C. The age groups were divided into the following categories to align with state and federal definitions for juveniles: 0-17, 18-21, and over 21. The number of juveniles fluctuated somewhat over the three-year period but was markedly consistent, as were the age groups 18-21 and those over 21 years of age.

Figure 1: Number of Missing Person Entries by Age and Year

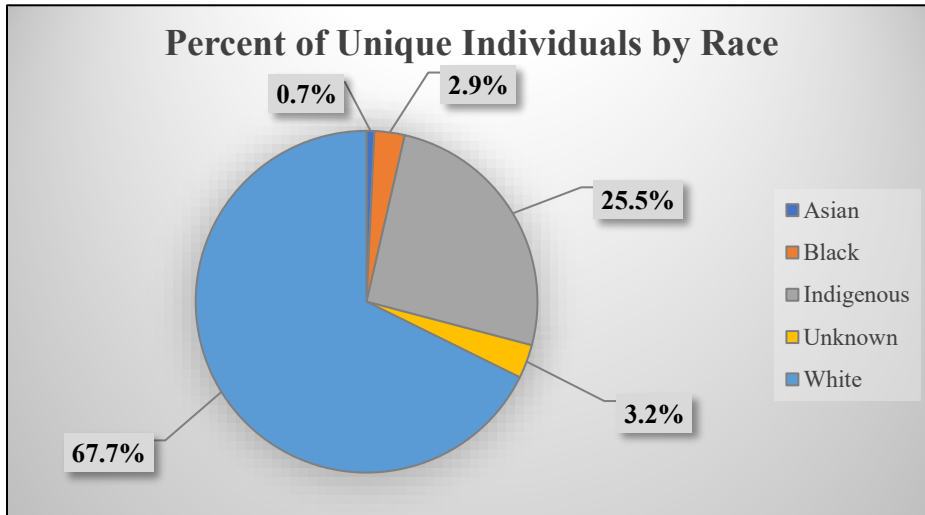


⁵ Easy Access to Juvenile Populations 1990-2018, Population Profiles, Montana, accessed June 19, 2020. https://www.ojdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/asp/profile_selection.asp

Race

According to the U.S. Census, 2019, the estimated population in Montana was 1,068,778.⁶ 89% of the population is White, 6.6% is Native American, 0.6% is Black, and 0.9% is Asian. As seen in Figure 2 the majority of Montana's missing persons were white ($n=2,203$, 68%) compared to Native American ($n=830$, 26%), Black ($n=93$, 3%), Asian ($n=24$, <1%) and Unknown ($n=104$, 3%). A disproportionate number of Montana's reported missing persons are Native American (3.9 times their population) and Black (5 times their population).

Figure 2: Percent of Unique Individuals by Race



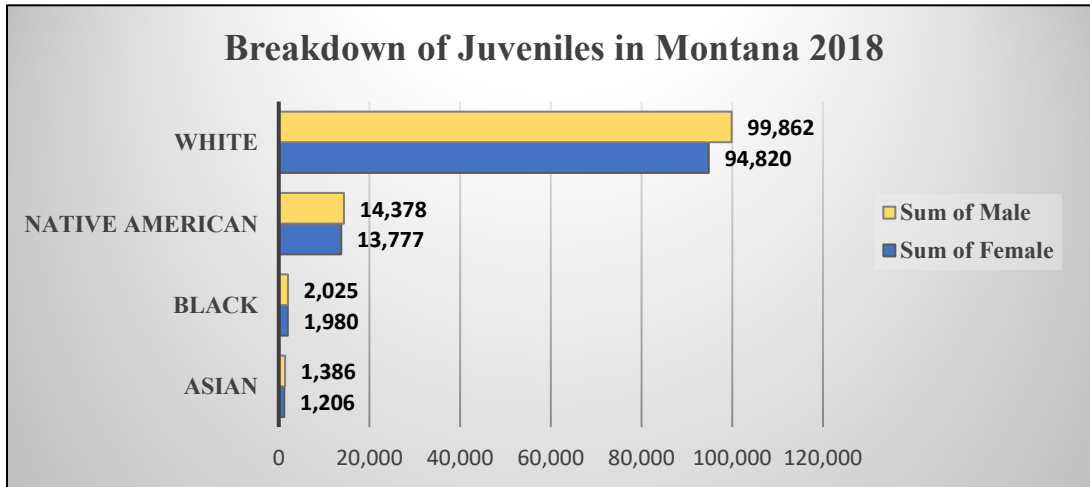
Native Americans are 4 times more likely to go missing than Whites

Race groups are not Hispanic. Hispanic persons can be any race and account for 6.3% of Montana's juvenile population. Juvenile Whites make up 80.4%, American Indian 10.7%, Black 1.5%, and Asian 1%.⁷ The breakdown of juveniles by race in Montana as of 2018 is shown in Figure 3.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Quick Facts, Montana, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MT/PST045219>

⁷ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Juvenile Population Characteristics, Montana, accessed June 19, 2020. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/population/qa01103.asp?qaDate=2017&text=no&maplink=link3>

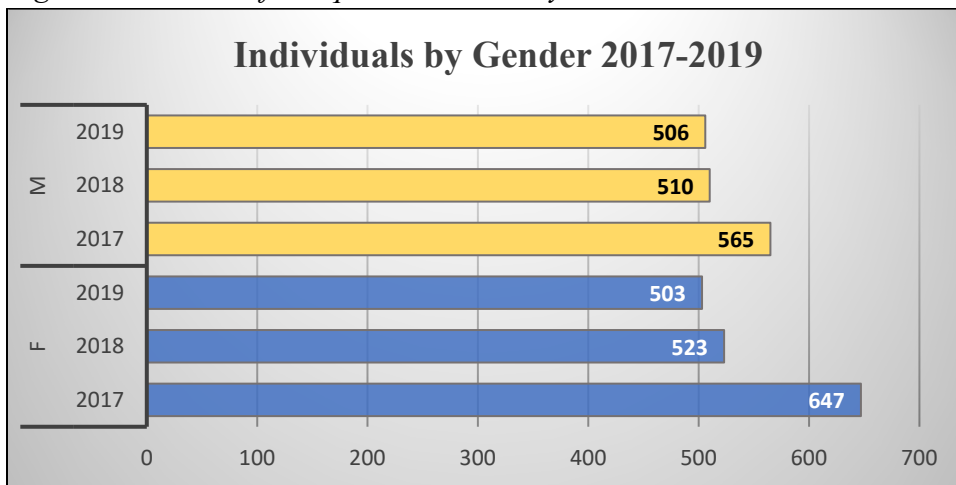
Figure 3: Count of Juveniles by Race and Gender in 2018



Gender

In Montana, males are estimated to make up 50.3% of the population with females at 49.7%. The number of females that went missing compared to males was just slightly higher over the three-year time period (f=1,673, 51.4%; m=1,581, 48.6%). See Appendix D. *Note -Missing Person Clearinghouse entries are not identified as two-spirit or trans-individual.*

Figure 4: Number of Unique Individuals by Gender and Year



However, there were a disproportionate number of Indigenous females as compared to males among Clearinghouse individuals (830 total Indigenous missing: f=491; m=339).

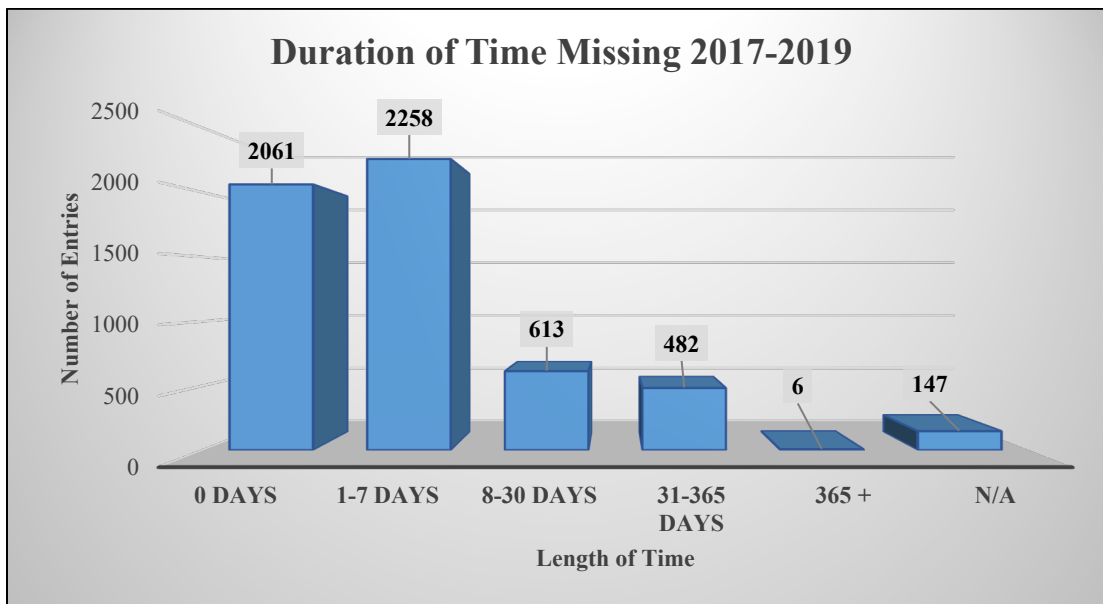
Figure 5: Percentage of Indigenous Individuals by Gender



Duration of Time Missing

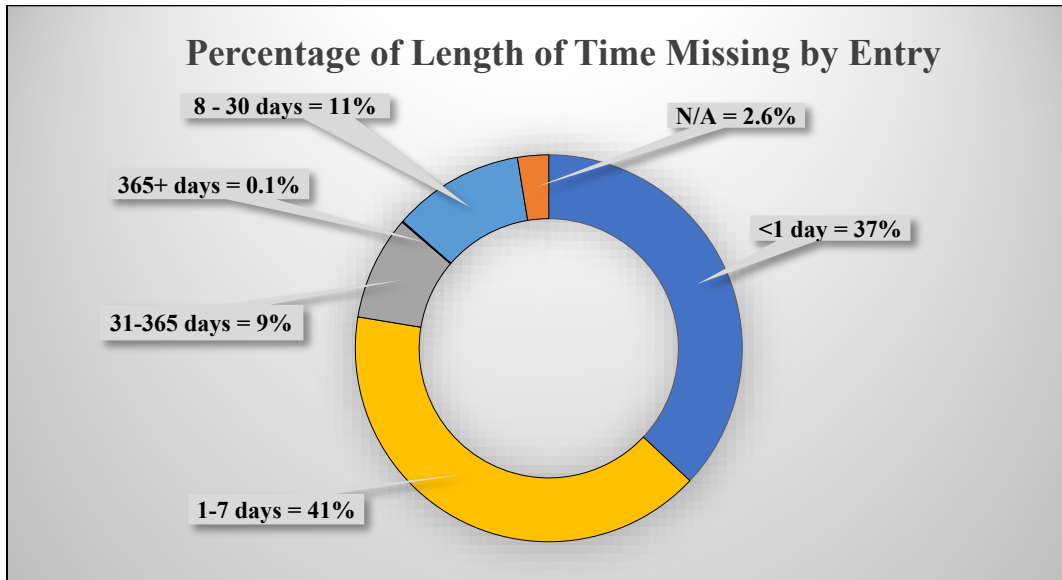
The length of time that individuals were missing varied widely over the three-year period. Duration of time was measured beginning with the date and time the record was entered by law enforcement into the database. All entries had a beginning date of at least January 1, 2107 (when the record was created) and an end date if they had been found as of 12/31/2019. If a person was found after 12/31/19 or was considered actively missing as of 1/1/20, they were not included in this count ($n=147$). The majority of people are missing anywhere from 0-7 days ($n=4,319$ or 78%) meaning that the highest percentage of cases are resolved within either the same day or within seven days.

Figure 6: Duration of Time Missing



Most people who were entered in the clearinghouse were missing 1-7 days ($n=41\%$) followed by less than 1 day ($n=37\%$).

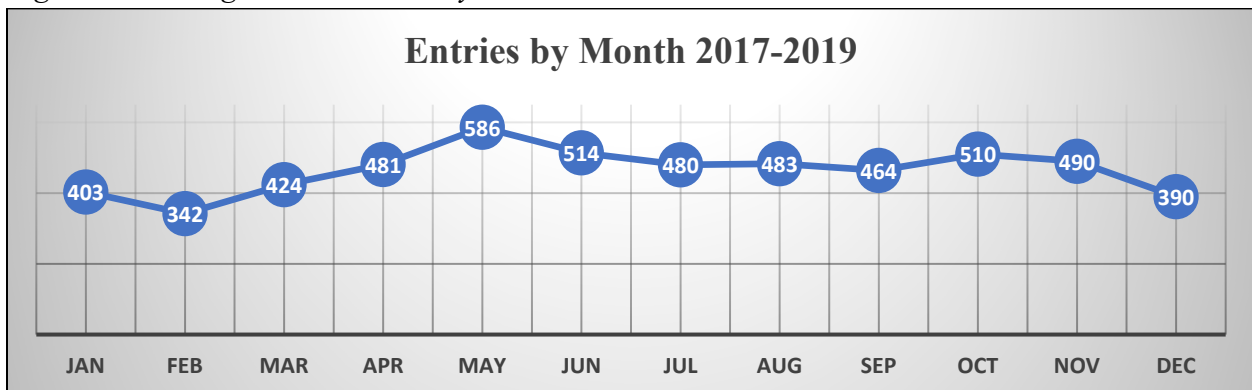
Figure 7: Percentage of Duration of Entries



Entries by Month

The month that people went missing was also analyzed. Analysis in future phases could include dates of events in communities (i.e. fairs, pow wows, sports tournaments, etc.) and could be cross-examined, with the location of where a person went missing and where the person was located, to determine if travel to other communities/regions is an element that contributes to going missing. In Montana, the number of people missing is lowest in February and increases by 70% to its peak in May. The numbers decrease slightly and remain fairly steady until they begin to further decline in winter.

Figure 8: Missing Person Entries by Month



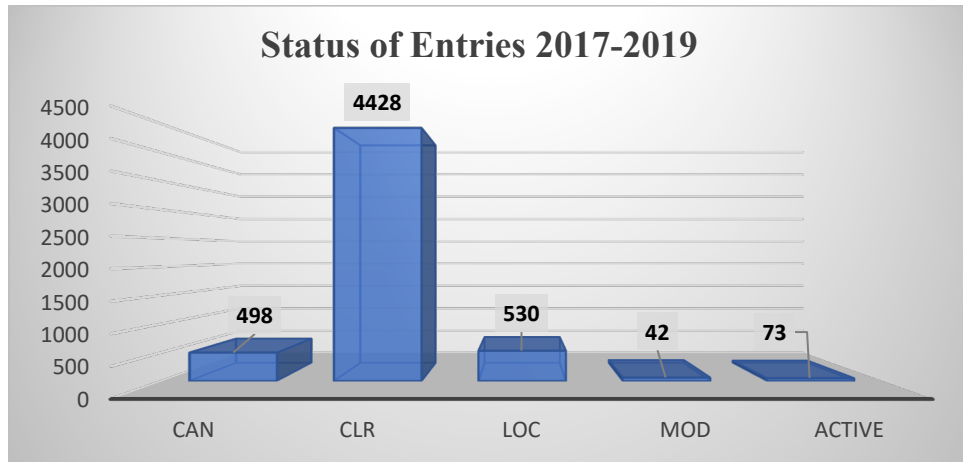
Status

The Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse data analysis included looking at whether law enforcement took action, the person was found, or the person was still actively missing. There are four types of categories for records: cleared, cancelled, located, and modified. Active entries do not generally have a category entered (they may be left blank) but are indicated in the chart below. Examples for these categories are:

1. **Cancelled:** A family member goes missing and is reported to law enforcement. The family calls law enforcement back to report that the person returned home and is fine. The record would be considered invalid and should be *cancelled* as no law enforcement action is taken.
2. **Cleared:** A runaway juvenile is reported missing to law enforcement by his/her parents. The parents call back 2 hours later to say the youth came back home. Many agencies would still send an officer to speak to the missing youth to make sure there are no signs of abuse, distress, etc. Because law enforcement made contact with the missing person, the record would be *cleared*.
3. **Located:** A person is reported missing in Helena, Montana. The Helena Police Department takes the report. The missing person is found by Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. Jefferson County Sheriff's Office would update the record to *located*. Either Helena Police Department or Jefferson County Sheriff's Office would call the family to let them know the missing loved one is safe.
4. **Modified:** An existing record is changed in some way. If the initial entry had an incorrect date of birth or the law enforcement agency found a more accurate height/weight compare to what was first entered, the agency that entered the missing person would *modify* the record to reflect the changes.
5. **Active:** The missing person has not been located or recovered by the 12/31/19 end date for this data analysis project.

The vast majority of cases in Montana are cleared by law enforcement as shown below.

Figure 9: Status of Entries



Missing More Than Once

There were 2,297 individuals who were entered only one time over the three-year period; 957 individuals went missing more than one time. The average age of those who went missing multiple times was 15 years old.

Figure 10: Age Groups of Those Missing More than Once

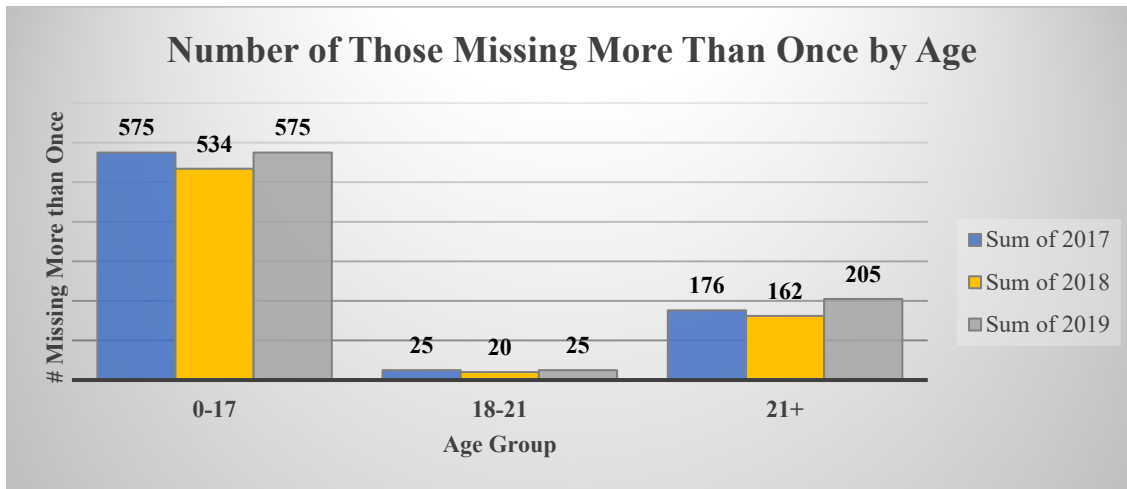
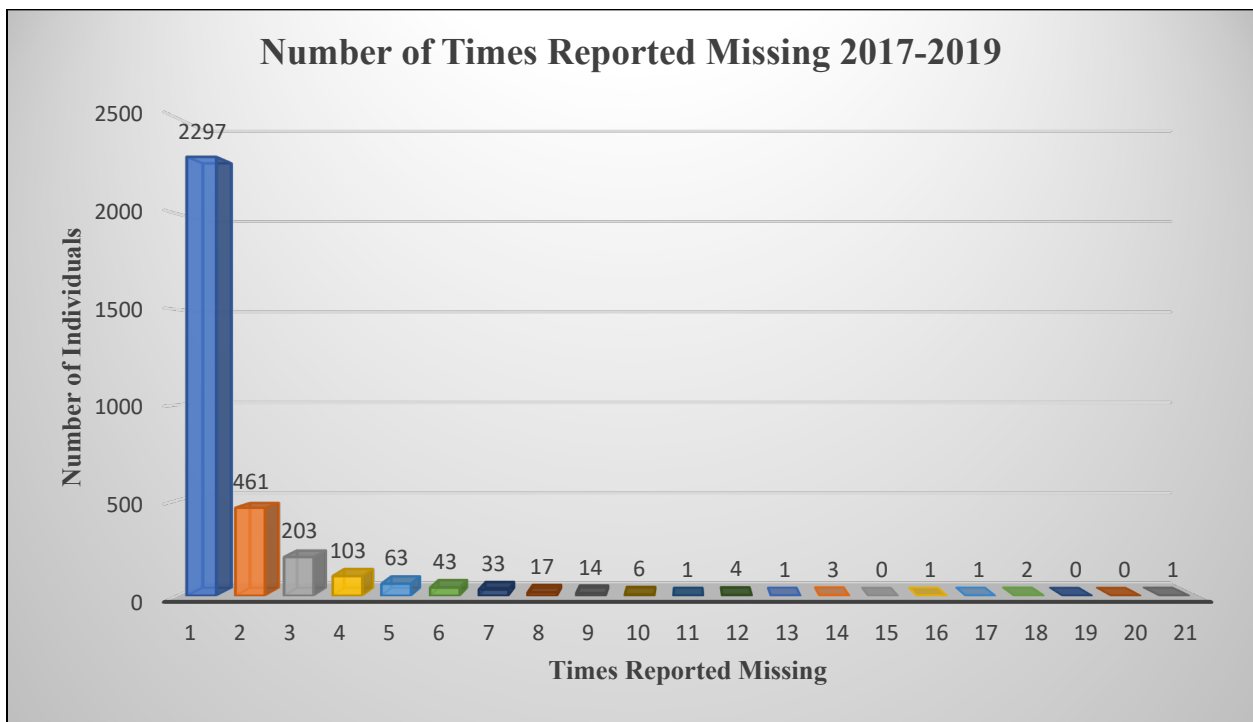


Figure 11: Number of Individuals and Count of Number of Times Reported



The average number of entries was 3.44 times with 2 being the fewest and 21 being the most times one individual was entered over the three years.

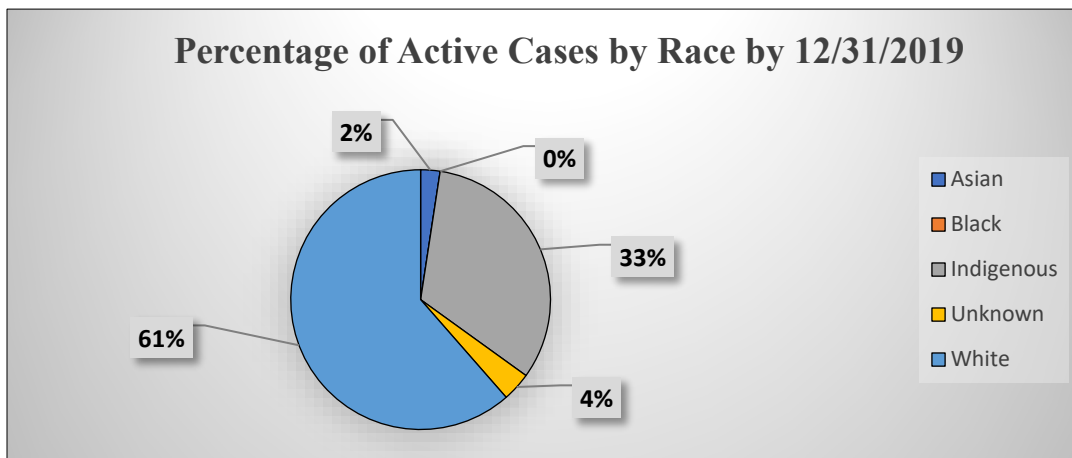
“What we found surprising in the data analysis is that 81% of the individuals are under the age of 18, but they represent only 21% of our state’s population. Of additional concern is the number of people who have gone missing multiple times. We know that Montana needs a multi-faceted approach when it comes to addressing missing persons, especially for youth and those who go missing more than once in their lifetime.”

- Jon Bennion, Chief Deputy Attorney General

Actively Missing

At the end of 2019, there were 110 listed as active missing persons in the Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse. For the purposes of this data analysis, anyone not found by 12/31/19 or with no date entered as resolved in the database was considered active. The percentage of those actively missing by race shows that Native Americans were disproportionately represented at 33%, exceeding the percentage of missing individuals by race over the three-year period. One significant departure from Figure 2 is that no persons who were identified as Black were actively missing at the end of the three-year period. Many of those may not have been long-term missing as most cases were resolved in 2020. At the end of 2019, of the active entries, ten had been missing 3-25 days (5 were Indigenous, 50%), 20 were missing 31-365 days (7 were Indigenous, 35%), 70 were missing between one to two years (18 were Indigenous, 26%), and ten had been missing between two to three years (3 were Indigenous, 30%). See Figure 12.

Figure 12: Actively Missing as of 12/31/2019

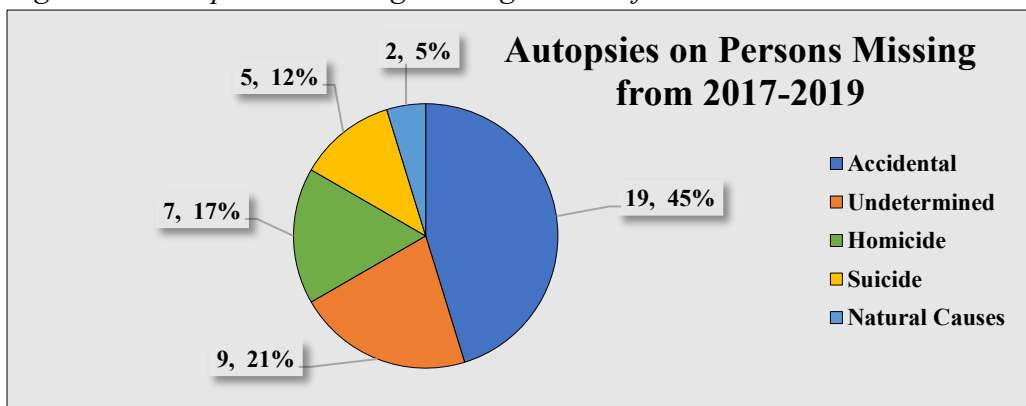


As of June 22, 2020, there were 11 active long-term missing Indigenous persons who went missing within the 2017-2019 time period. However, there were at least nine additional Indigenous persons who went missing prior to 2017 for a total of at least 20 long-term missing Indigenous persons.

Autopsies

The Montana Department of Justice houses the Forensic Sciences Division, also known as the Montana State Crime Lab. When comparing the list of deceased that had been autopsied to the missing persons list for the three-year period, it was found that 42 had been examined by the State Crime Lab. In stark contrast to the average person on the missing persons list (juvenile female), adult males were found to be deceased more often. Nearly half of those found deceased had been designated as accidental deaths ($n=19$; 45%), almost 20% were considered homicide ($n=7$), and 12% were due to suicides ($n=5$). Of significant importance, and particularly frustrating for Indigenous family members, were the number of deaths found to be undetermined ($n=9$; 21%).

Figure 13: Autopsies Matching Missing Persons from 2017-2019



Most autopsied persons were male (35 of 42 autopsied missing persons - 83%)

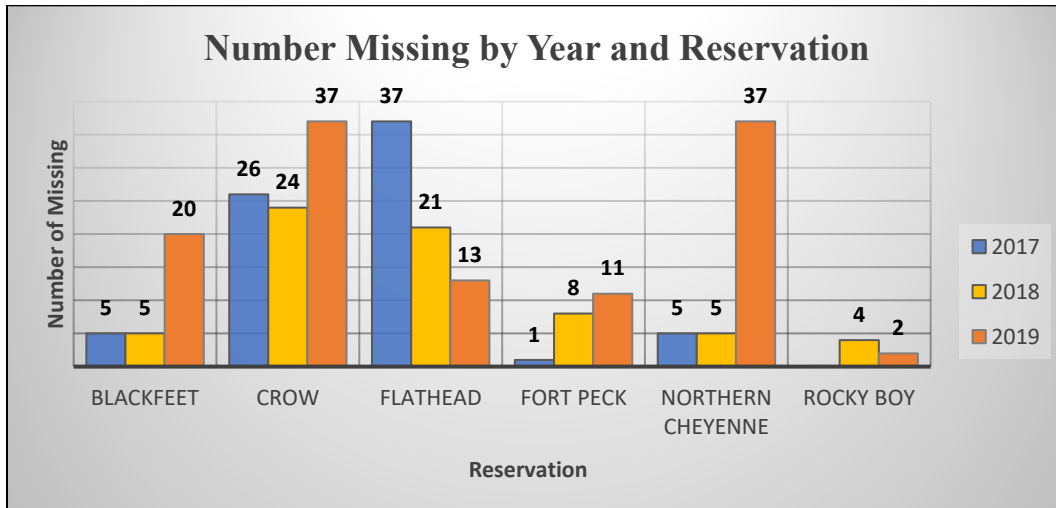
Tribal Reporting

There are eight federally recognized tribes in Montana. Local, county, and tribal law enforcement may all be involved in missing person reports depending upon the reservation, with two exceptions:

1. The Little Shell Tribe does not have their own tribal law enforcement and any calls of missing tribal members would go to other law enforcement agencies (i.e. Great Falls Police or Cascade County Sheriff).
2. Fort Belknap does not have a criminal justice information network terminal and works with Blaine County Sheriff's Office for reports.

When looking at the number of missing person reports by reservation and year there are clear indications that reports have increased from 2018-2019. On the Blackfeet, Crow, Fort Peck, and Northern Cheyenne reservations, BIA reporting increased in 2019.

Figure 14: Unique Individuals Missing by Year and by Reservation 2017-2019



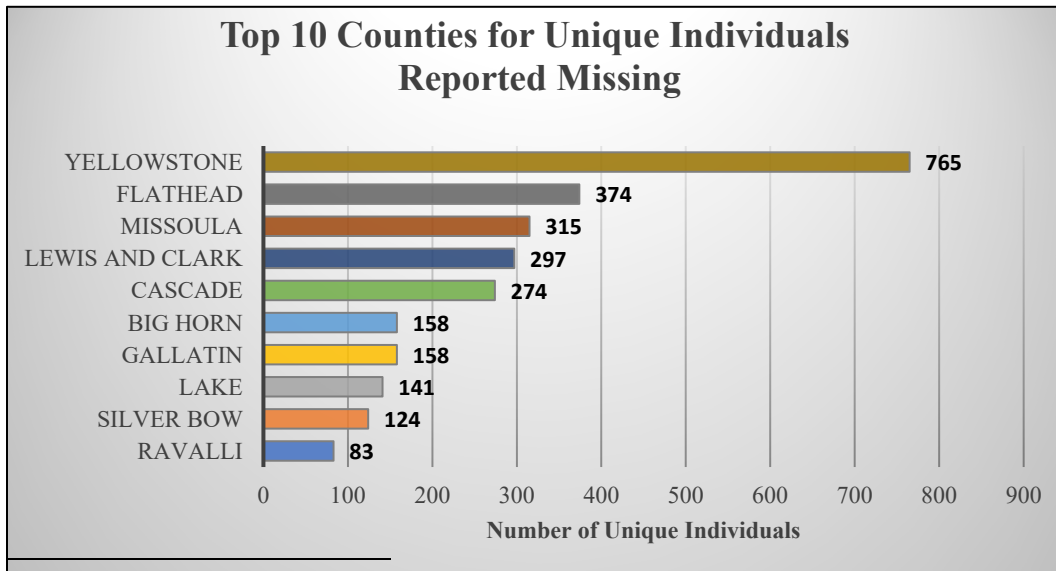
Tribal reporting (BIA) increased significantly in 2019. Chart does not represent all native Americans missing, just those reported to Tribal Police or BIA.

Landscape Across Montana

Geographically, Montana ranks as the fourth largest state in area, although it is the 8th least populated state, and the third-least densely populated of the 50 states.⁸ Billings, the largest urban area in the state with almost 110,000 residents, is located in Yellowstone County and contains the highest number of unique individuals missing ($n=765$) over the three-year period.

Missoula County (Missoula), Cascade County (Great Falls), Gallatin County (Bozeman), Silver Bow County (Butte), and Lewis and Clark County (Helena) are the next largest in the state and are also among the top 10 counties for entries. There are also relatively small population counties that include reservation communities like Flathead, Lake, Big Horn, and Roosevelt Counties.

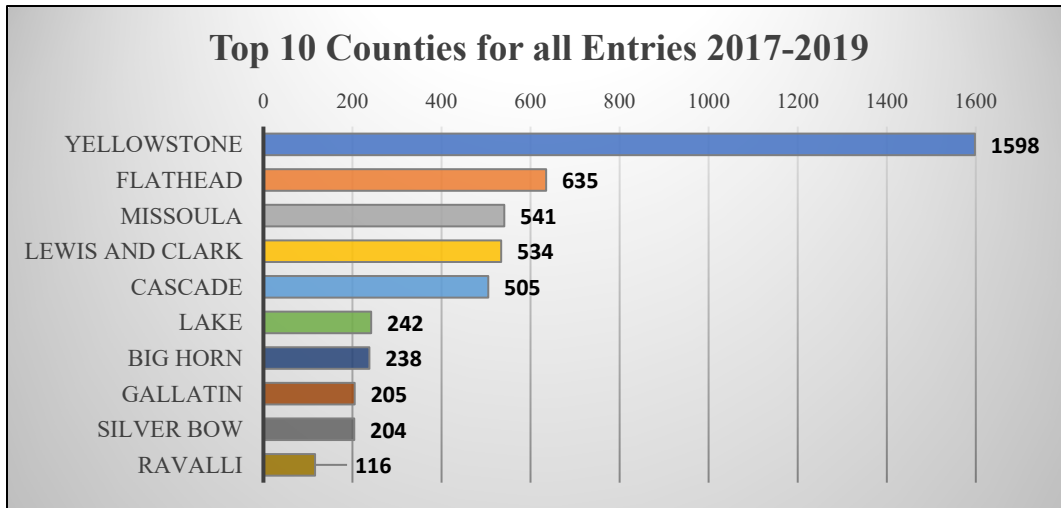
Figure 15: Top 10 Counties for Unique Individuals Reported Missing



⁸ Wikipedia, "Montana" accessed July 8, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montana>

The number of unique individuals who were reported missing from the 10 top counties for entries totaled 2,689. This number accounts for 82.6% of the total individuals in the Missing Persons Clearinghouse.

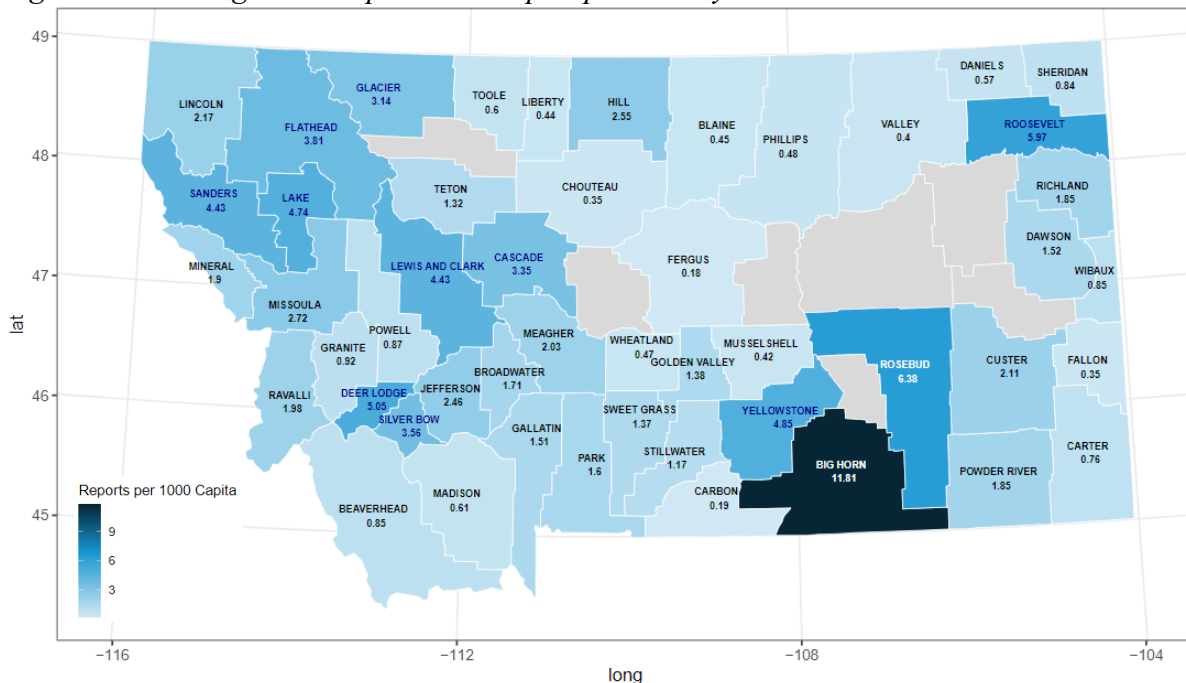
Figure 16: Top 10 Counties for Total Missing Person Entries



The number of total entries reported from the top 10 counties totaled 4,818, approximately 86.5% of the total 5,567 missing person entries from 2017-2019.

To account for the varying population sizes of counties across Montana, the number of first time missing reports per county is divided by the county's population and scaled to be equivalent to the number of first time missing person reports (per 1000 people per county) as shown in the map below.

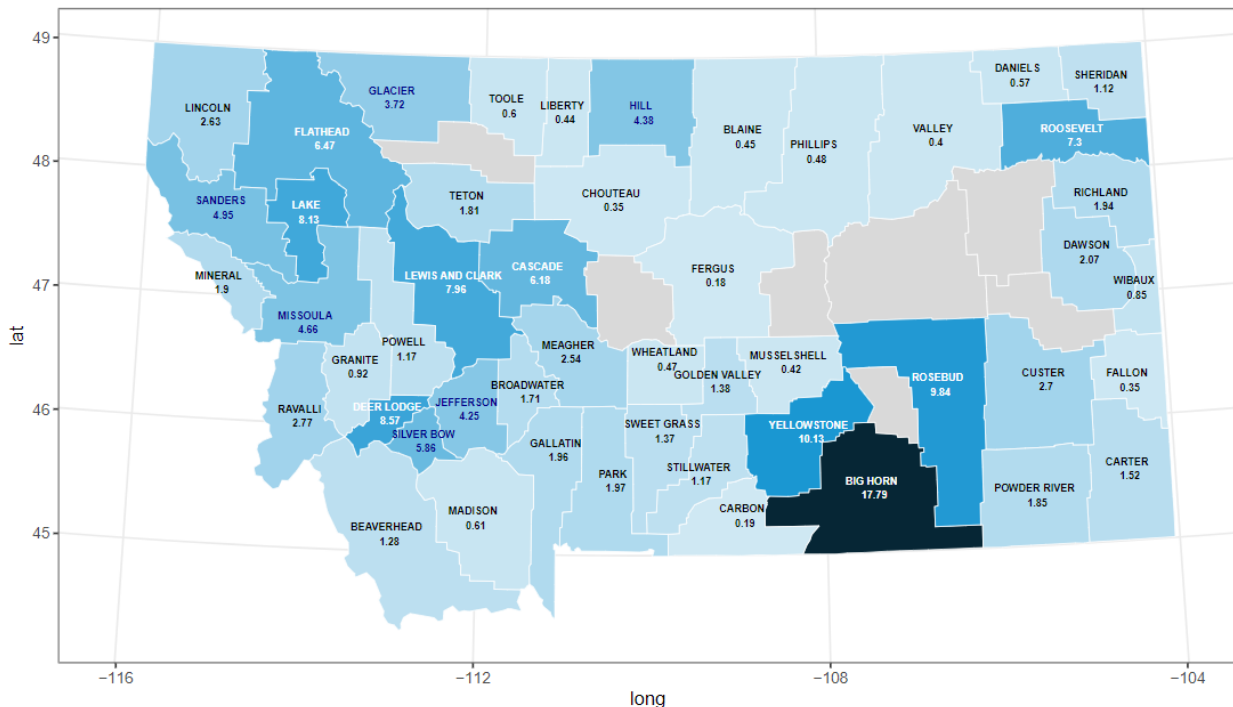
Figure 17: Missing Persons per 1000 Capita per County in Montana



Of particular concern are the counties containing reservations such as Big Horn (largely containing the Crow Indian Reservation), Rosebud (Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation), and Roosevelt (Fort Peck Indian Reservation). Big Horn's per capita rate ($n=11.81$) is nearly three times higher than Yellowstone County. Rosebud County ($n=6.38$) is the second highest per capita, closely followed by Roosevelt ($n=5.97$). These areas stand out as concerning and worthy of additional analysis in future phases. When considering that 81% of missing persons are juveniles and 26% overall are Indigenous, looking deeper into other data sources may help reveal why these factors exist in Montana.

For non-reservation counties, Yellowstone County leads the top 10 counties per capita ($n=4.85$) for missing persons. Missoula ($n=2.72$) and Gallatin ($n=1.51$) counties have a lower-age population due to their large state universities and would be expected to have higher per capita rates for missing person reports than other counties. Lewis and Clark County ($n=4.43$) and Deer Lodge County ($n=5.05$) have approximately the same per capita rate as Yellowstone but are 3 times higher than Gallatin County. Figure 18 contains all missing person reports from 2017-2019, including reports for individuals who went missing more than once, divided by each county's population size scaled to 1,000 capita. The counties with higher missing person reports per capita follow similar scales as demonstrated in Figure 17.

Figure 18: Missing Person Reports per 1000 Capita per County in Montana



Staff from the Montana Attorney General's Office and the Montana Department of Justice provided presentations of the data analysis project to the following policy makers and tribal governments:

- May 5, 2020 – Press Briefing

- May 7, 2020 – State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee
- May 11, 2020 – Montana Governor’s Office
- June 18, 2020 – Little Shell Chippewa Cree Executive Board
- June 23, 2020 – Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribal Council
- July 15, 2020 – Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council

Additional presentations were delayed by state and tribal restrictions for COVID-19. Presentations will be scheduled for remaining tribal governments and other stakeholders in Montana in August and September 2020.

The analysis of missing persons data from 2017-2019 represents the most comprehensive inquiry in Montana to date. The Montana Department of Justice will use this information as the basis for determining future data analysis. Looking deeper into active cases from the past three years, education records, youth court records, as well as looking at how social factors like crime, poverty, substance abuse, and mental health contribute to the issue will be essential in understanding not only WHO is going missing but WHY they are going missing.